

Peck, Samuel H., M.F.A. *Speak For The Silent*. (2010)
Directed by Michael Ananian.

My thesis is a body of work entitled *Speak For The Silent*. This project is a sequential narrative of block prints in black and white on handmade paper containing ingredients grown in North Carolina based. The Narrative is based on an interview with an illegal immigrant. The story is told strictly through images without text. My art walks the line between high art and propaganda questioning issues related to the current social conditions understood through personal human experience.

Speak For the Silent

By

Samuel H. Peck

A Thesis Submitted to

The Faculty of the Graduate School at

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro

2010

Approved by

Committee Chair

(C) 2010 Speak For the Silent

To Prudence Peck

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee
of the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of
North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee Michael Ananian, John Maggio, Lee Walton, and Richard Gantt for believing in my work and me. Your confidence, consistent demands, and questions continue to push me to new heights. Westcote Peck, Omar Hopper, Josh Waldman, and Michael Black thank you for continuing to want the best for me and advocate for it even when I wouldn't. David Modler and Eric Scott your insight to my skills, with the visual journal, has allowed me to truly see myself as a professional within my field. Emilie, my love, thank you for your encouragement and unwavering belief in my abilities. Lilia, I cannot thank you enough for having the courage to share your story with me.

A note to the reader, some names have been changed within this paper to protect the family involved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
SPEAK FOR THE SILENT.....	1
NARRATIVE.....	14
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	26
CATALOGUE.....	27

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 - Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi da. <u>The Entombment of Christ</u>	3
Figure 2 - Osama Tezeku, Buddha, Pg 303.....	5
Figure 3 - Diego Rivera "The Flower Carrier"	8
Figure 4 - Kollowitz, Kathe. <u>In Memoriam for Karl Liebknecht</u>	9
Figure 5 - Masereel, Frans. <u>Passionate Journey</u>	10
Figure 6 - Kentridge, William. Still from <u>Stereoscope</u>	18
Figure 7 - Hyde, Laurence. <u>Southern Cross: A novel of the South Seas</u>	22

SPEAK FOR THE SILENT

My thesis is a book of linoleum-cut prints that when bound together constitutes a sequential narrative that I have based on an interview with an illegal alien. The interview was about the journey of Lilia who, at nine years old, crossed into this country with her sister and mother in order to be reunited with her father who had been working in this country for several years. My project arises from the need to give a voice to a people who are denied one; they are labeled illegal aliens. My story is not about America's immigration laws but the humanity that we, citizens and immigrants, all share.

My sequential narrative of my prints recounts the story of an illegal immigrant's journey to the United States. The story is about not only her journey but also the reflections about the harsh immigration laws and policies of the United States of America. I point out these details because my interview is based on the experience of a young woman raised locally for the past ten years. I hope her story will establish the relevance of this issue here in Greensboro, North Carolina. Illegal immigrants have no recourse in the society of the United States. Without a defense against our society, except to hide; illegal aliens are ostracized and subject to much xenophobia and racism. I do not condone that they are breaking the law, but my work insists that these laws need to be reexamined.

My narrative consists of linoleum blocks printed on paper that I made. Each linoleum block is roughly eight inches tall by six inches wide. Every block contains a frame which creates edges that the pictorial space can press and play against in an effort to explore how images interact illusionistically with the physical space we exist in. Inspired by Caravaggio (Figure. 1) and his play with chiaroscuro and space I have pushed the boundaries of where our space ends and the space of the print begins.

The use of only black ink in my prints is done to relate the work visually to the role of photography as faithful reproduction and its documentary properties. In doing this I hope to place the images in a more concrete space physically yet connected to the idea of worked memories psychologically.

I made the paper with a mix of cotton and abaca fibers blended with fruits and vegetables grown locally here in North Carolina and boiled for twenty hours with soda ash as to keep the produce from causing any acidity within the paper. I then hand pressed each sheet. The paper is the body that will carry this work and that paper relates to the local people who read the work because the food that is consumed by the local populace is the same material that the paper is

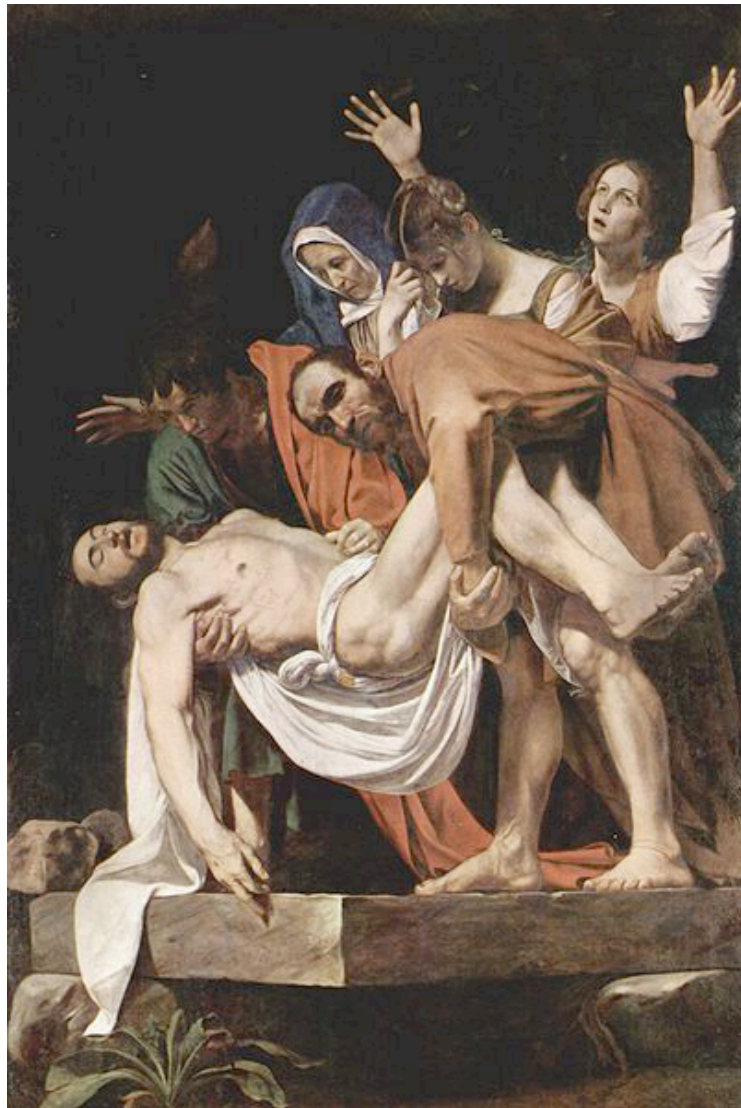


Figure 1 - Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi da. The Entombment of Christ.

constructed from. Fibers for the paper are grown from the ground many of these immigrants find themselves working; however, it is still not "their" soil. The linoleum cut prints are bound together to make a sequence telling the story of my interview and the relationship of the characters.

Modern Art has regarded those artists whose work deals with a narrative unfavorably. Rather than being valued for its merits, narrative is seen as anachronistic and irrelevant to the practice and theory of modern art. In an attempt to put the visual emphasis back in storytelling, I have decided to remove the necessity of the written word by telling a story of our time and current conflicts visually. The tradition of history painting in the western world depends on narratives that the viewer already knows such as biblical stories and Greek myths thus a single image could suffice as a narrative. Hogarth developed a way through sequential paintings and prints to tell a contemporary story. A single image was insufficient because it could only imply a well known narrative. It could not supply the other elements of a story, which have to be included so that a personal narrative could be understood. Hogarth realized this problem and used sequences of separate images to supply those missing narrative components: plot line, chronology, the passage of time, and character development.

Sequential narratives in today's society such as Buddha by Osamu Tezuka (Figure 2) have developed as a combination of text and imagery and make the visual image subservient to the text. Instead, I believe

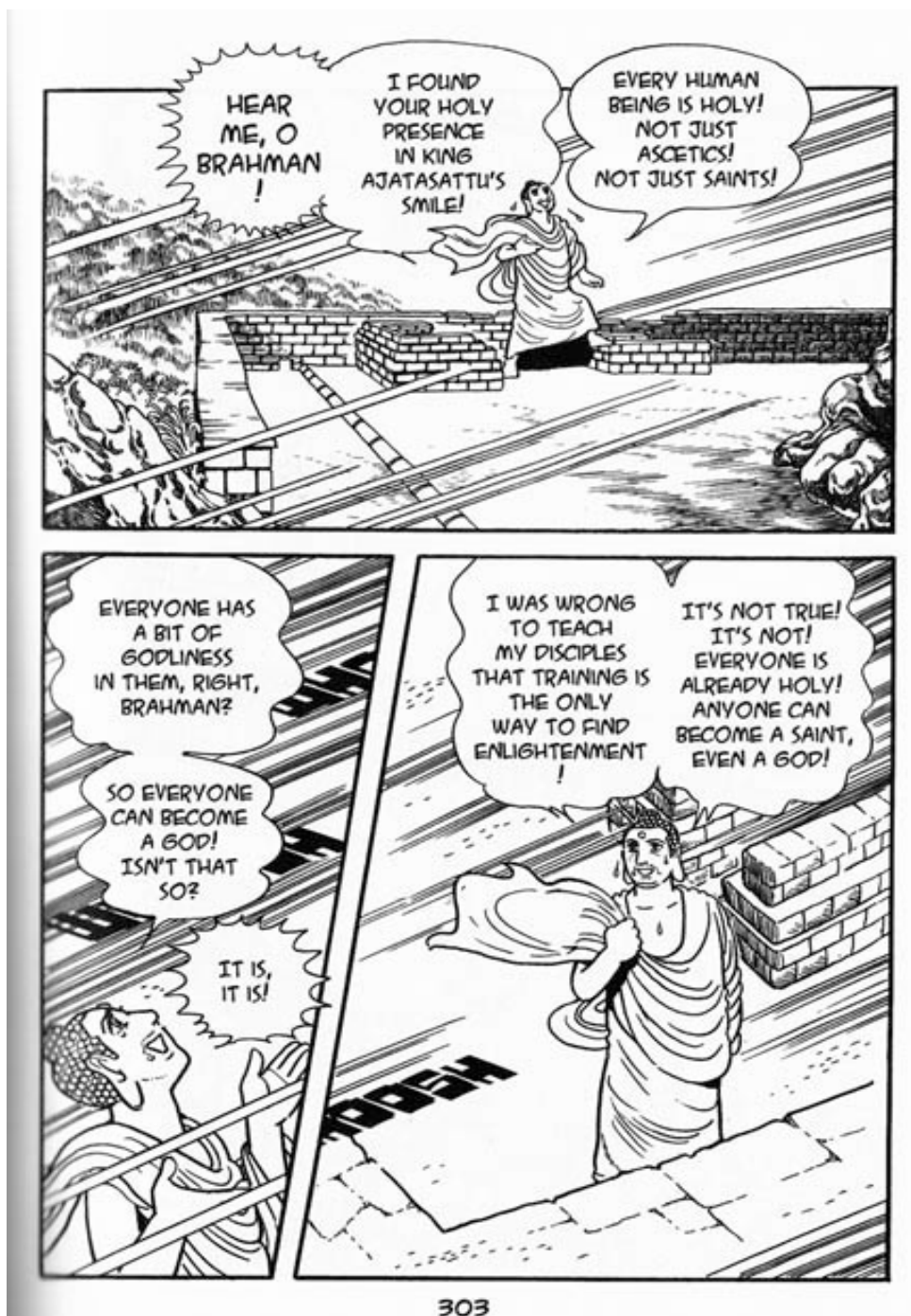


Figure 2 – Osama Tezeku, Buddha, Pg 303

there is more potential in storytelling using a visual language alone to drive a narrative such as mine, a contemporary story about the hardships of immigration to the United States. I have made prints in the tradition of twentieth century wordless books by Frans Masereel and Lynd Ward. In addition, I borrow the comic convention of "thought bubbles" and "word balloons", but instead of text I use images. With the exception of Milt Gross, Art Spiegelman, and Scott McCloud, bubbles in modern comics usually contain text, not images. My characters' "thought bubbles" and "speech balloons," reference the ideas of the "thought balloon"(McCloud, 100) without diminishing the art form itself by relying too heavily on the convention widely known and understood within the comic world. The convention of "thought bubbles" being the form used to reference communication in comics.

Instead of my work sitting only within the world of comics I intend for it to bridge between the ideas of comics and the artist's book. The thoughts and ideas of the story's characters are used within the images as background to tie together the concept that reality is not just a physical space that we live in but a mental construct as well. Within my bubbles I amplify and emphasize my story in much the same way as ancient Sumerian writing (McCloud,141-161). These pictographs relate to my work because of the way they are read as sequential images. Rather than using a set of abstract symbols for the sounds of speech, the images within the prints are a reference to human experience. The wordless novel utilizes a way of communication based on sight, as does text, but removed from the interpretation necessary with abstract symbols.

Within my project, I have looked to the work of the Mexican Muralist, Diego Rivera (Figure 3) and the German Expressionist, Kathe Kollwitz (Figure 4) for ideas on how to convey the "Expressionism" for the visual emphasis of my narrative. The work of these artists has taught me about the importance of simplifying the cut of my plates so the graphic contrast communicates what I intend. This simplification was in service to the viewer emphasizing the psychological space that Lilia moved through.

I started thinking about the psychological and temporal aspects of the wordless novel. Passionate Journey by Frans Masereel (Figure 5) sets up the prototype for what all other wordless novels henceforth have built upon. After seeing his work I realized that a narrative did not have to be from action to action as is commonly done in movies and television but that a book had a special contemplative space and could move aspect to aspect. I am talking about the transitions in the sequence when I discuss aspect-to-aspect and action-to-action. I believe that aspect-to-aspect is a group of moments within a larger time frame such as the transition between Plate 18 to Plate 19. You know in Plate 19 that Lilia, her sister, and mother are on a truck with other illegal immigrants and then you see them walking to a house and resting. The transition between is unspecified in its length of time. Within Plate Eight's four frames you are taken out of an aspect-to-



Figure 3 – Diego Rivera "The Flower Carrier"



Figure 4 – Kollwitz, Kathe. In Memoriam for Karl Liebknecht. Kathe Kollwitz Museum. Homage to Kathe Kollwitz. Berlin, 2005.22.



Figure 5 – Masereel, Frans. *Passionate Journey*. Dover Publications, 2007

aspect format to be slowed down in action-to-action bringing the frame pace to a halt.

Masereel's content in Passionate Journey was in a cubo-futurist style discussing the life of the artist. He put his own experiences in the work first-hand to learn from as a teaching tool. His main character is an artist who as an unclassified member of society can move freely between the rich and the poor. Masereel brought focus onto the documentary nature of his main characters' struggle between the objective and subjective within the character's psychology. This content began to get me to think about my work as a gift. Within these thoughts arose two ideas within the work. First, my plans to give the work away as a 'zine, a gift as object. A 'zine being a self published, underground paper issued at irregular intervals with limited means and appealing to a specialist readership. This would serve as a system of distribution to bring awareness to the problematic issues of immigration within Greensboro. Although I am giving away the 'zine, I must admit that I want to retain ownership of the book as a commodity in its precious form (the handmade book and unbound suite of prints) but I see that it can be used as a gift in the second idea. This second idea of the work as gift involves the experience of the object as a gift. Within this experience there are two separate dialogues, the first dialogue is with the art world and the fine line this work rides between propaganda and high art. The second dialogue is between two cultures; the one I live in and that of the illegal immigrant. Here I am speaking from the point of naïveté because my understanding of the experience is through someone else's words, the interview with the illegal immigrant Lilia. However my goal is to make evident my empathy for these suffering people and how this empathy can be a model for dialogue between the two sides of the immigration issue. I do consider myself a reflective educator, but the reciprocation of this gift is not

to be confused with preaching. I feel that my actions are in the sincere spirit of gratitude. In his book, The Gift, Lewis Hyde talks about the power of gifts and their reception, "But when we refuse what has been offered to the empty heart, when possible futures are given and not acted upon, then the imagination recedes" (Hyde, 252). I was open to listen to both Lilia and Emilie; I can only hope that my work is received in the same spirit. "The artist completes the act of imagination by accepting the gift and laboring to give it to the real (at which point the distinction between 'imaginary' and 'real' dissolves)" (Hyde, 252,253).

With the idea of the gift in mind, the question arises, "What is the role of the artist?" Traditionally artists make work in the studio to be shown in galleries and museums. I don't believe that I am completely in this vein of artist because of what my work is about, and the interactions I seek with my viewer. My project allows me to redefine my assumption of what an artist is and to explore new possibilities. The repeated presentation of the work defines for me two possibilities I seek with this work. One is that I seek a more public interaction with the viewer. The unbound version of the book allows for many people to see the work at once. The second interaction that I am looking for is a private one. The bound version of the book being handled by a single person is what I see as the private interaction with the work.

I have selected the medium of printmaking because of its history as a democratic process. Specifically I am speaking about the dissemination of information and how woodcuts were used in this way in the past. Although that is not the most efficient way to communicate

now, aesthetically I believe there is a human connection that happens with the ink on paper coming from a woodcut rather than a digital image that has been made quickly and printed. I believe that there is a separation between the human being and the digital work. In contrast the woodcut is a handmade object that speaks of its connection back to being human. In my work I have experimented with my images using contemporary printmaking processes for large dissemination of my images (such as the photocopier) and scanning them into the computer to be enlarged and printed digitally. I see these as a ways to harness contemporary technology to serve the work rather than allowing the medium of digital work to define the aesthetic of the image. Following the tradition of artists' books in the avant-garde of the twentieth century, I plan in the future to take this project into other forms. I plan to use this precious original version of my book as a template for dissemination to the masses in a world dominated by print and Internet content; the work as a cheaply printed 'zine is a way to get the work into the hands and eyes of people who would not normally enter a gallery or museum. I also plan to use the current blocks as key blocks by which I can design color blocks in the Japanese tradition of wood block color printing. I want to do this to emphasize the portion of the narrative that is Lilia's story in black ink, which would remind one of the documentary nature of photography and indicate that her story took place in the past. While the present plates in the narrative would be in full color thus heightening the viewer's knowledge of the flashback narrative. I foresee some recarving of the plates in order to provide greater clarity to the story. This would give me the ability to repeat more imagery within the sequence and provide more consistency from image to image as a means to clearly distinguish the different time

periods and shifts in my narrative sequence. Members of my thesis committee and I have discussed problems in my process that created by a deficiency in the analytical nature of digital collage rather than a more flexible approach that is found within drawing. I am excited about what this work has suggested for me and I see other drawings, prints, and books related to the current social conditions understood through examining personal human experience.

NARRATIVE

The following is the entire narrative of my wordless novel. I have included an image of each plate at the end of the text for further clarity and reference.

Plate 1: The title page of my book. An immigrant is jumping a fence. Cut out of the paper are the words, "Speak for the Silent". This is an effort to reflect the nature of the medium of woodblock, carving or cutting an image.

Plate 2: A staircase set of frames leading the viewer from outside the main frame in a diagonal path to the bottom of the main frame. The first of these smaller frames is completely outside the larger frame and its subject is of me approaching my car. In the second of the four staircase frames my car enters the freeway. The third of these smaller frames presents, through the windshield of a car, me driving my car. The fourth and final frame shifts to an open car door as I get out of my car. Leading with this staircase of smaller frames to the larger frame where the viewer is looking over my shoulder while I sit in a coffee shop waiting for Lilia to arrive. My eyes are looking out the front window at a van that is parked in front of the coffee shop. This scene takes place in the present.

Plate 3: Lilia is walking through an open door into the coffee shop's short foyer with a checkerboard floor. She is wearing jeans and a jacket; her clothing places her and the story in an early twenty-

first century society that acknowledges women's rights. This scene is in the present.

Plate 4: Lilia and I are sitting at a table in the coffee shop in the present. The viewpoint is over my shoulder, only a portion of my back, right shoulder, and the back of my head are visible, while Lilia's full face is visible. As in many of the following plates this plate asks the viewers to complete the figures based upon partial information provided within the frame of the print. Many of the figures, when viewed up close, are only partially in view. This cropping heightens the idea of a larger space that that exists within the scene and brings the viewer right into the story.

Plate 5: The space of the five-inch wide by seven-inch tall print is divided into four equal areas. The division is done in order to have a moment of transition within the panel, and where one psychologically zooms into the story that Lilia recounts during her interview. Moving from our present moment into the past of her words. The frames move ever closer from showing her head, shoulders, and full upper torso across the table to a close up of her mouth and nose. The plates the order of the frames is from top down then left to right. This panel is both a reference to the psychological phenomenon the viewer begins to experience when imagining the space someone describes within a story and uses the narrative framework of other forms of sequential art such as comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels.

Plate 6: The story begins with Lilia, her sister, and mother walking away from a van in a desert landscape. This scene takes place in Lilia's past; it is a flashback the space being divided almost in half between landscape and sky gives an idea of the fear and

psychological pressure these three women faced as they began their journey. This break from the present time into the world of memory as two distinct realms comes from the exemplar influence of Art Spiegelman's seminal work Maus. Within the body of Maus, Spiegelman moves his readers seamlessly between his father's memories of surviving Nazi Germany as a Jew and the current state of Spiegelman's personal life. I have adopted this tool in order to tell the full story of the interview from my meeting with Lilia, how I know her through my wife, and how this is a not a first person narrative.

Plate 7: Here in the past the viewer moves much closer to the main characters; their physical characteristics as women become more apparent. They are walking past a house. A figure is sitting on the porch. Here the viewer begins to grasp of whom the larger tale of these prints is about. I believe I must mention William Kentridge (Figure 6) as the archetype who gave me permission and courage to tell the story based on an issue within the culture of the United States. Kentridge's

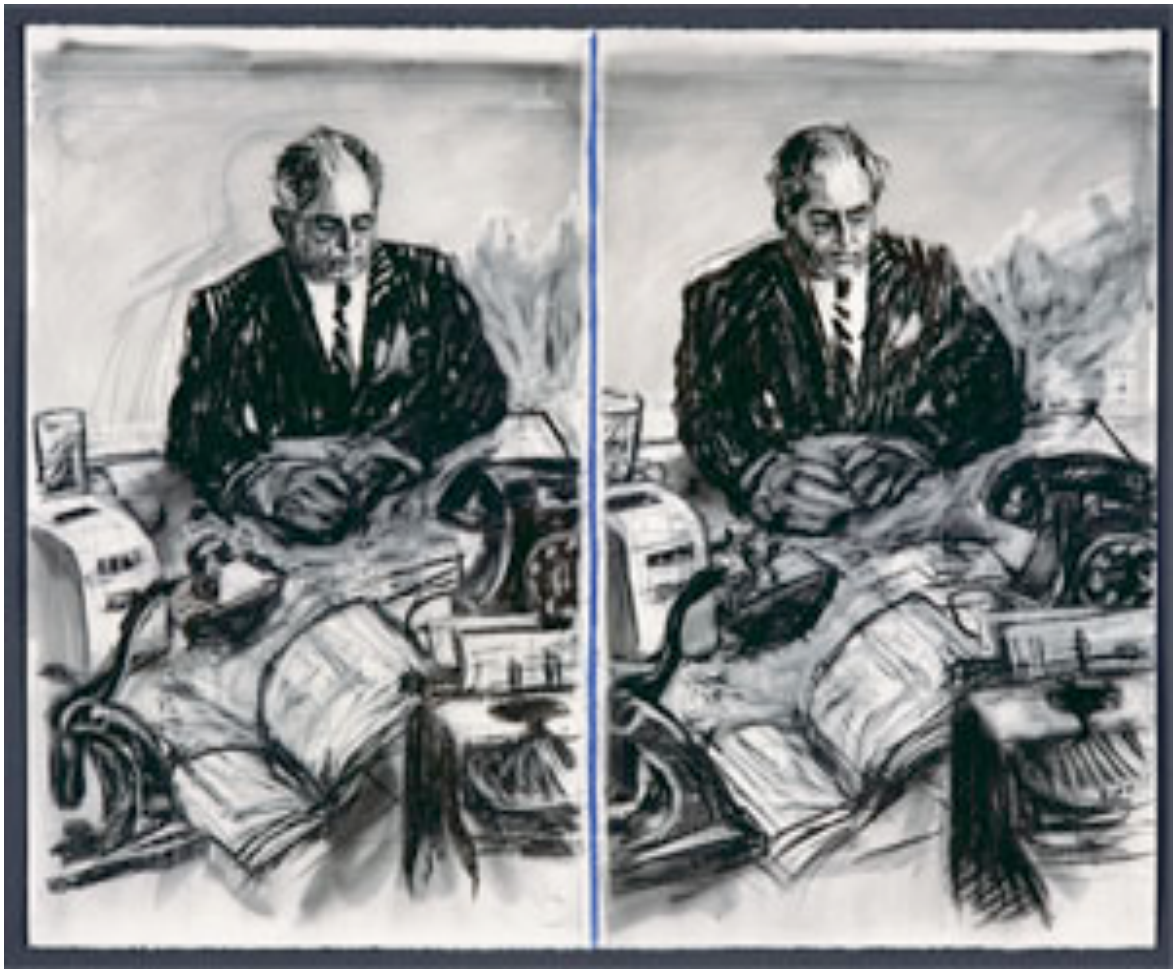


Figure 6 – Kentridge, William. Still from Stereoscope, 1994

drawings and animations often deal with ideas of what it means for his characters to be white men in South Africa dealing with ideas of trauma and healing through journey (Christove-Bakargiev, 408). Working figuratively I feel an artistic kinship to Kentridge because of his willingness to work with the figure despite what has happened historically with Conceptual, Minimalist, and Post-Minimalist art in the later half of the twentieth century. In staying true to the archetype Kentridge sets forth, I must acknowledge that I am a member of the oppressing culture speaking for a member of another culture oppressed in the United States

Plate 8: This panel provides a mental transition via a sequence of recognition that moves from left to right across four vertical frames each being one and an eighth inches wide by seven inches tall. The first frame continues a portrait view of Lilia's face in the negative centrally focused but cropped on the left and right sides so you can only see the central portion of her face. The second frame presents only the left side of her face a little closer with an expression of astonishment in the positive but turned so she is now in three-quarter view. In the third frame Lilia is in profile view enlarged so that the focus is upon the upper portions of her nose and her entire eye. The fourth frame is an old man in the negative wearing a cowboy hat and sitting on a bench with his hands together in his lap. This moment-to-moment emphasizes the world of the senses (McCloud, 78); across the four frames the viewer is moving moment-to-moment. The moment we are seeing is both Lilia's head turning to see the old man and a zoom-in as the frames progressively focus on Lilia's eye which in the third frame looks left to right at the old man. In traditional realism the artist portrays the world outside of the inner space of

concepts and ideas. This allows for a more objective view of the story, which ties the viewer to what is concrete in this world even though the context is not specific. This concrete understanding links the images portrayed into the necessity of immigration reform today in United States.

Plate 9: Set in the past, Lilia's mother gestures to the old man with her right hand high and her left hand low; her palms face each other as a river is snakes up from her mouth to the sky in a speech balloon. The speech balloon and hand motion are meant to ask the old man, "How deep is the river?" The old man responds by pointing to a telephone pole to indicate that the river is a telephone pole deep. The goal of all of these plates is to tell the larger story but in the end each plate should be able to stand on its own and give the sense of trepidation that Lilia and her female family members went through.

Plate 10: This plate shows the three main characters in Lilia's memory walking away from the picture plane down a dirt road with mountains as the landscape background. To suggest the thoughts of the three women the telephone poles that run along the road and into the distance moves up into the sky area where the final telephone pole is submerged into water.

Plate 11: Transitions back to the time that the interview took place, and we see Lilia in three quarter view with an oval space in the center of her head occupied by a semi-submerged telephone pole. This telephone is the same that was presented in Plate 9, but here it is as a "thought bubble" inside Lilia's head.

Plate 12: The right edge of Emilie's body is evident (Lilia's former school social worker) as she enters the scene on the left. Here

Lilia and I are at a table talking. Replacing window scenery in the background windows behind Lilia and me are two images. The one on the left is of our hands (Emilie's and mine) interlocked. Emilie's shows her wedding ring symbolizing our marriage; this scene is behind me in relation to the viewer. The scene on the right windowpane shows a river snaking from far away to close up, which is the part of the journey on Lilia's mind. This plate is in a horizontal format.

Plate 13: The viewer is looks over the shoulders of Emilie and me at Lilia. The viewer can only see these three from the waist up suggesting that all three sit at the table. In the background, the snaking river, which moves from far away to close up, suggests that a flashback is eminent. The background is completely about Lilia's thoughts and no longer split.

Plate 14: Returning in a flashback to the story is done through a close-up view of a Lilia's eye. In her pupil is the same snaking river scene from the previous two plates. This idea of seeing through the eyes of our narrator and protagonist and getting into her minds eye comes from the work of Lawrence Hyde in his wordless novel, Southern Cross about the atomic bomb testing by the United States following World War II. (Figure 7)



Figure 7 – Hyde, Laurence. Southern Cross: A novel of the South Seas. Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1951.

Plate 15: Still inside the latest flashback the viewer sees the three women climbing aboard a shoddy raft in a body of water while their coyote in the middle ground wades into deeper water and with hands at his sides feeling the water he looks to the opposite shore.

Plate 16: Changing to a horizontal format and to an aerial view the spectator sees the coyote towing the women across the Rio Grande on a raft. This horizontal format accentuates the psychological distance between the family travels across the river.

Plate 17: This horizontal format dramatically shifts the viewer's point-of-view: as a disinterested viewer in Plate 15 and as through the characters eyes in Plate 16. Beyond the hands of the three women the coyote is dragging their raft across the river as the women look toward the distant shore; we are the 3 women.

Plate 18: From an aerial viewpoint above the cab of a pick-up truck the viewer sees the three women resting, sharing the bed of the truck with other illegal immigrants as it moves up the highway closer to the United States. This plate is in horizontal format and still within the memories of Lilia's past.

Plate 19: This plate's vertical format splits into two horizontal frames. The plate is composed from left to right; the first frame is two inches wide while the second frame is three inches wide. The first vertical frame shows Lilia and her sister holding hands and walking up a sidewalk to a house as Lilia's mother follows closely behind them. In the second frame Lilia and her sister rest their heads upon their mother's lap. Her mother's face expresses concern, and she places her chin in her hand.

Plate 20: In the foreground a police officer in riot gear, holding a shotgun continues the mood of impending doom the women have faced their entire journey. In the middle ground we have Lilia's mother holding her daughters' hands as the three of them approach a bus that is positioned diagonally and physically projects from background into middle ground. People are boarding it through an open door. Behind the bus we see the second story of a house in the upper right hand corner.

Plate 21: From an aerial perspective the viewer sees the same bus, traveling over a winding road across a deserted landscape towards distant mountains in the background. This plate expresses that the bus has left the station and has traveled some distance from its original location.

Plate 22: The police board the bus, and pull people up from their seats, as they move down the isle, closer to Lilia and her family. The viewpoint is from the back of the bus and is through the characters eyes.

Plate 23: This horizontal format is vertically split frame. In the first frame the viewer looks over the shoulder of a police officer that looks down at something. The officer is shown from the waist up in front of some bus seats. In this second frame the three women fearfully sit, the composition moves left to right, from youngest to oldest across the frame. In this second frame against the right edge the viewpoint shifts from the characters' to the viewpoint of the police officer. In fact, the police officer occupies the right edge, and the viewer is behind the police officer

Plate 24: A looming police officer gestures with his foreshortened arm outstretched directing his open hand at the viewer.

The police officer is directs the three women to stay on the bus. There are many different officers within this narrative. Although this change in familiarity could be construed to be a lack of character consistency it is done purposely to show that the threat of incarceration involves not only a single police force but many law enforcement agencies in the United States.

Plate 25: Another police officer is points left, instructing a group of illegal immigrants to walk with their hands on their heads and away from a bus, door opened.

Plate 26, This plate consists of two horizontal frames within a vertical format. The upper frame shows Lilia's father, her mother, her sister, and Lilia at a table happily eating a meal. In the bottom frame we see the front of their modest single level house with a small yard, fence, and sidewalk. These characteristics place the home in an urban neighborhood. This plate is still in the past.

Plate 27: the last plate: we see a police officer car driving by their home. This plate continues the successive fade from inside to outside the house, and is the final fade out to the environment around their home. This scene makes evident that the family is reunited, but they do not live in a world with Disney endings. The doom felt throughout the narrative continues as they carry out their daily existence

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Christove-Bakargiev, William Kentridge and Carolyn. Press Play: contemporary artists in conversation. New York : Phaidon Press Inc, 2005.

Hyde, Lewis. The Gift. 25th Anniversary Edition. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

McCloud, Scott. Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art. Ed. Kurt Busiek, Niel Gaiman, Bob Lappan, Jennifer Lee, Larry Marder, Ivy Ratafia Steve Bissette. New York: HarperPerennial, 1994.

CATALOGUE

Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7

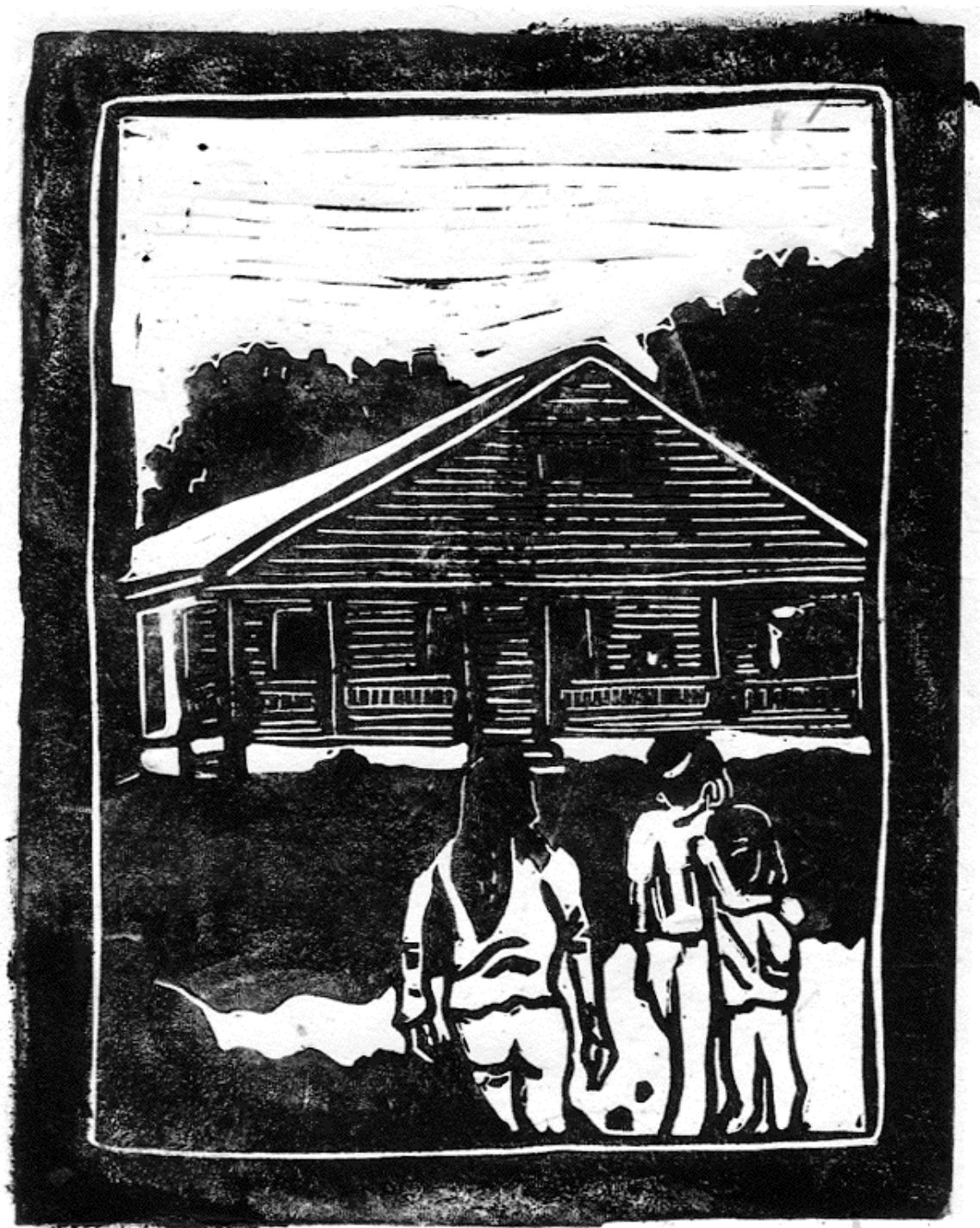


Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11



Plate 12



Plate 13



Plate 14



Plate 15

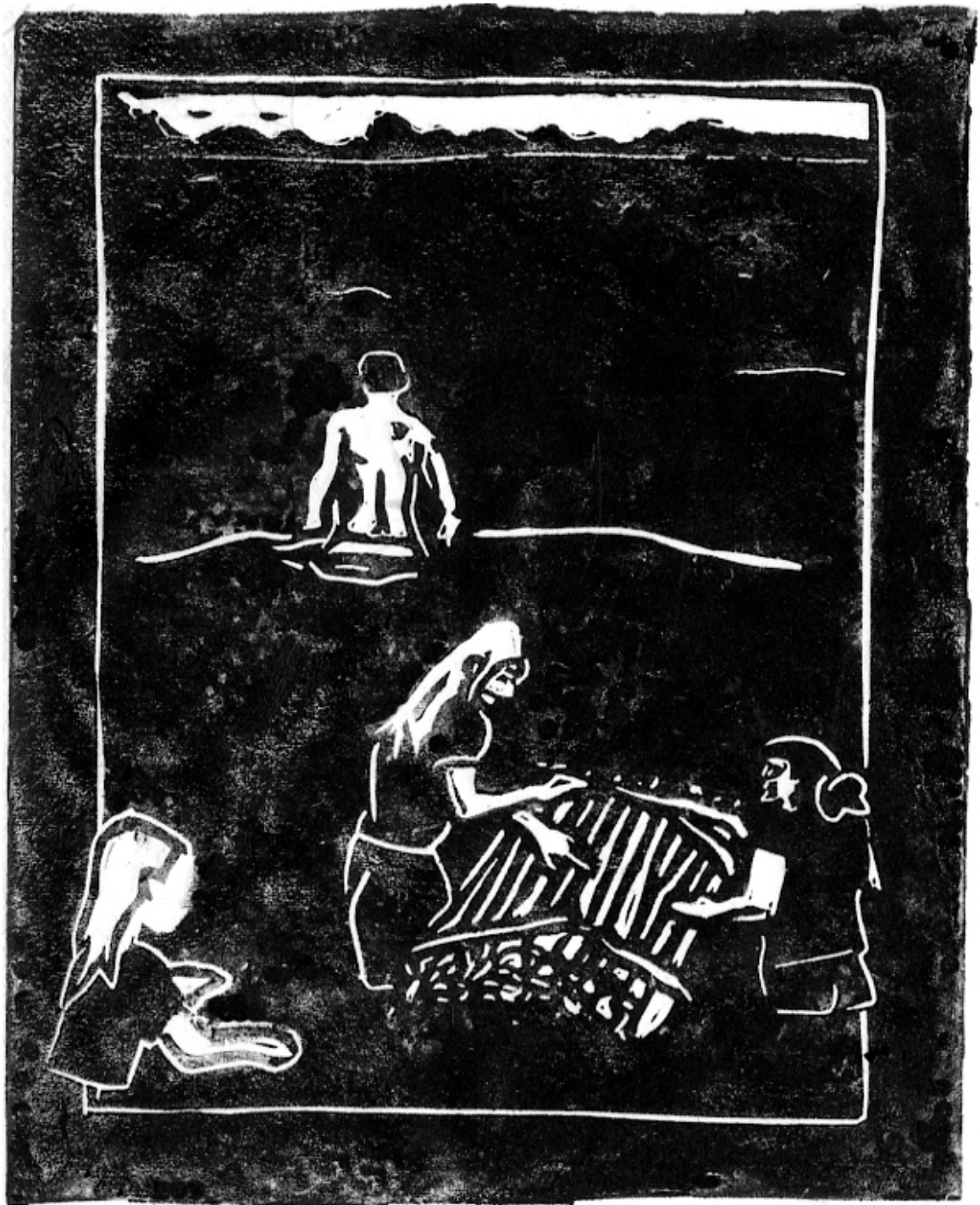


Plate 16

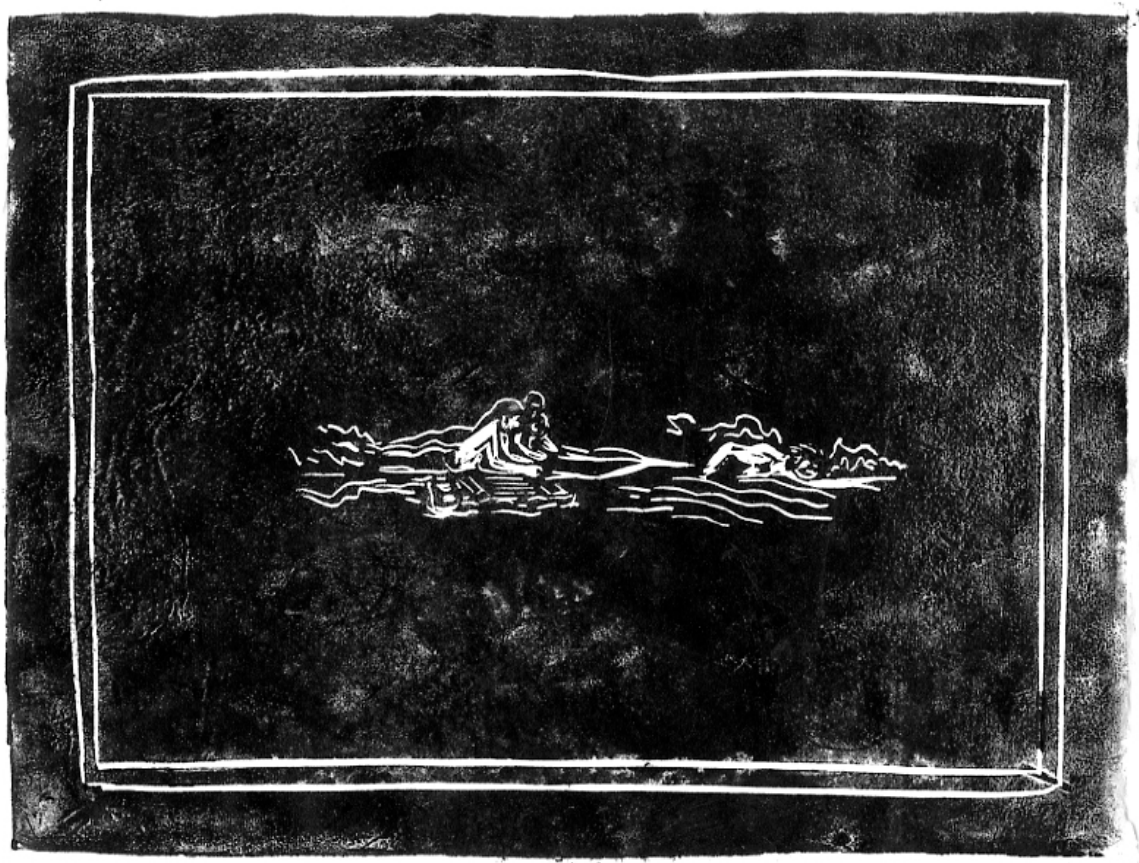


Plate 17



Plate 18



Plate 19



Plate 20

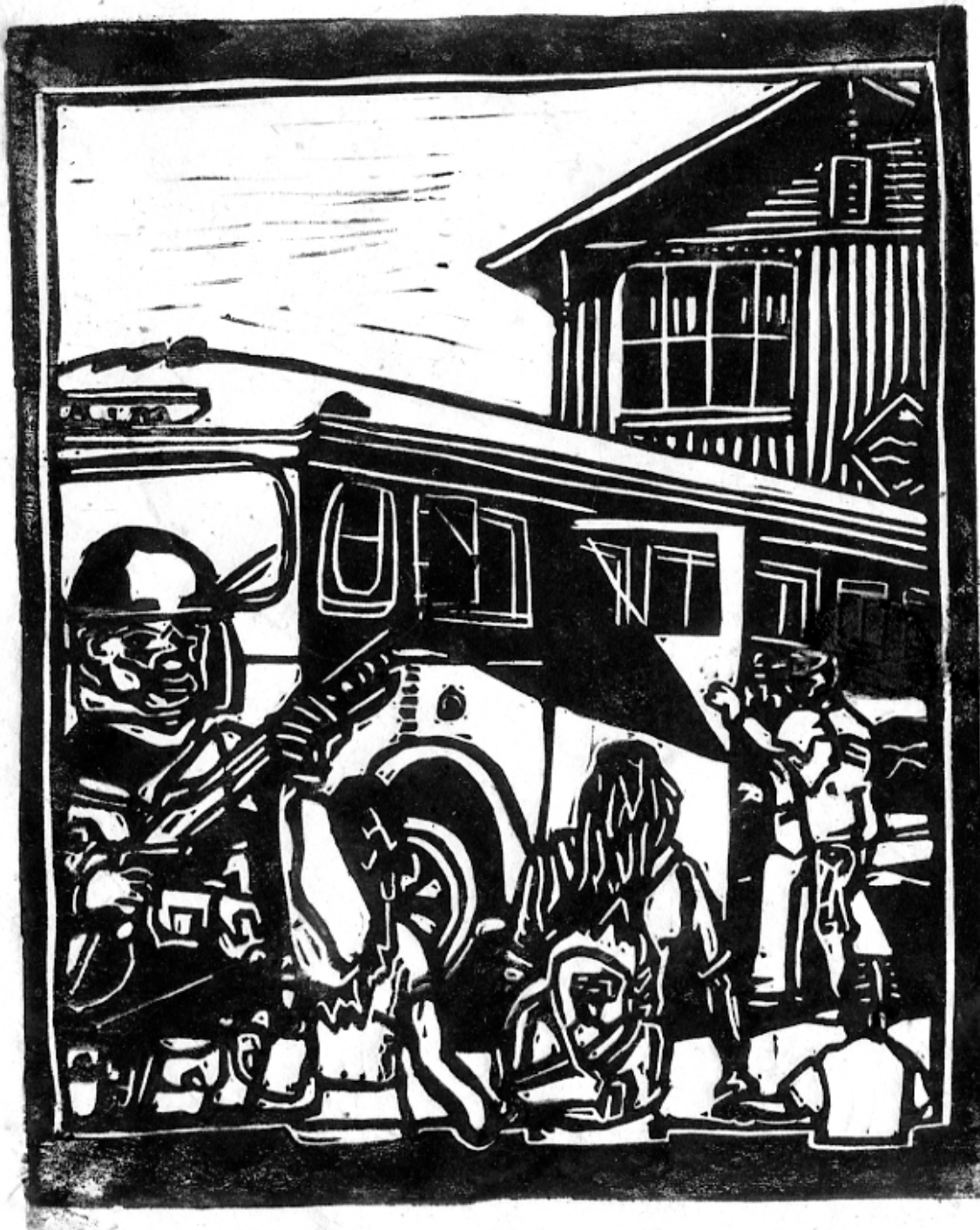


Plate 21



Plate 22



Plate 23



Plate 24



Plate 25



Plate 25

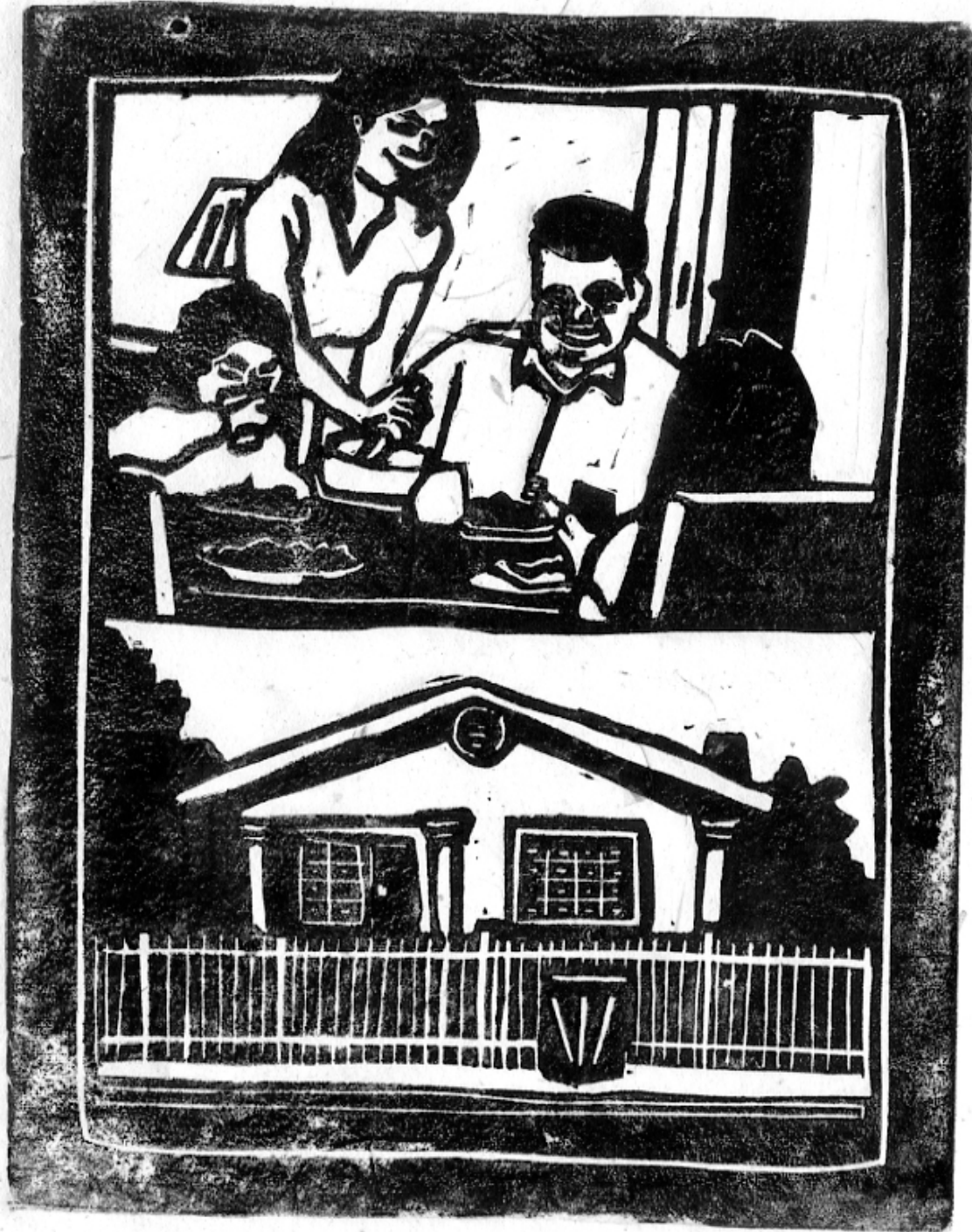


Plate 26

